

**A concentration of the Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera* L. (Lep.: Nymphalidae) in Cambridgeshire, August 2000.**

The recent note by Chris Tyler-Smith concerning the scarcity of the Wall Brown butterfly in central England from 1997 to 1999 (*antea*: 207-208) prompted me to record an observation made in Cambridgeshire this year.

On 10 August, at 11.00 am, I walked along the bank of the Old Bedford River, the northern boundary of the Ouse Washes Nature Reserve, to see which butterflies were feeding on the teasel, thistle and ragwort plants that abound here. The steep bank rises to some twenty-five feet above ground level and runs from south by south-west to north by north-east, creating a warm, south-easterly aspect. The banks are lightly grazed by cattle in summer; no shrubs are present, but stands of the above mentioned perennials are extensive. Cattle have worn their tracks into the bank at various levels and created bare patches close to the river's edge, surrounded by coarse grasses.

The weather was fine and warm. It was soon obvious that a number of Wall Browns were present and in little more than a quarter of a mile of walking at least fifteen were noted. Care was taken to avoid double-counting in view of the species' habit of "accompanying" observers by flying a short distance ahead, settling and reappearing. If anything, the count underestimates the number present. Males and females were seen in approximately equal numbers. No oviposition was observed, but females were watched fluttering close to the ground, particularly where grass grew over the indentations made by cattle's hooves; this habit is described in Heath and Emmet (1990. *Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*, 7(1): 250). No doubt egg-laying was taking place, and it is unfortunate that these banks are invariably flooded for several weeks each winter and spring. Presumably this would result in the loss of over-wintering larvae.

The Wall Brown was not uncommon in this part of Cambridgeshire in 2000. Several other records involving smaller numbers were made, but it is interesting that they were all associated with bare earth on tracks and droves, close to arable fields. – ROBERT PARTRIDGE, 11 New Road, Mepal, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB6 2AP.

**Is this the return of the Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera* (L.) (Lep.: Nymphalidae)?**

Whilst participating in a butterfly count on some waste ground on Canvey Island, Essex, I was very pleased to see a few freshly emerged Brown Argus. Many Peacock, Green-veined White, Orange-tip and Large White were also present, but the greatest delight was the recording of sixteen-plus Wall Brown. This species has been thin on the ground in recent years and so it was a surprise to observe so many on one count. It generally seems to be mainly coastal at the moment, perhaps this year may give us a population spread.

One of the rarest butterflies this spring in this part of Essex has been the Small Tortoiseshell. Last summer and autumn this species was low in numbers and at the time of writing this note (27 May), I have not seen a single larval nest anywhere during my many local rambles. – D.G. DOWN, Aegeria, 16 Woodend Close, Thundersley, Essex SS7 3YA.